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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 COLOMBO 000968

LONDON FOR SUTPHIN
CINCPAC FOR FPA TWINING

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/07/10
TAGS: [MOPS](#) [PREL](#) [CE](#)
SUBJECT: LTTE OFFERS TEMPORARY CEASE-FIRE

(U) CLASSIFIED BY: RICHARD H. SMYTH, DCM. REASON(S):
1.5(D), (E).

1. (C) SUMMARY. WITH THE SRI LANKAN ARMY HAVING PULLED BACK TO NEW DEFENSIVE LINES AND A SLOWDOWN IN LTTE ADVANCES OVER THE WEEKEND ON THE JAFFNA FRONT, THE LTTE HAS OFFERED A TEMPORARY CEASE-FIRE TO ALLOW GSL FORCES TO "WITHDRAW FROM THE UNFAVORABLE THEATER OF WAR WITH DIGNITY AND HONOR." THE OFFER PRESENTS THE GSL WITH A NUMBER OF DILEMMAS AND MANY UNANSWERED QUESTIONS; GOVERNMENT SOURCES ARE SAYING THAT THEY ARE "STUDYING THE OFFER." COUNTRIES ABLE TO ASSIST IN AN EVACUATION, IF ASKED, ARE GOING TO HAVE TO CAREFULLY EVALUATE THE RELATIVE PERMISSIVENESS OF THE LTTE OFFER. END SUMMARY.

LTTE PRESS RELEASE

2. (U) AT 0935(L), THE LTTE OFFICE IN LONDON ISSUED THE FOLLOWING PRESS RELEASE:

BEGIN QUOTE:

"THE LIBERATION TIGERS OF TAMIL EELAM (LTTE) WISHES TO STATE THAT IT IS PREPARED TO DECLARE A TEMPORARY CEASE-FIRE SUSPENDING ALL ARMED HOSTILITIES AGAINST THE SRI LANKAN ARMED FORCES TO FACILITATE THE BELEAGUERED GOVERNMENT TROOPS TO BE EVACUATED SAFELY FROM THE JAFFNA PENINSULA.

"OUR PROPOSED CESSATION OF HOSTILITIES WILL COME INTO EFFECT AS SOON AS THE SRI LANKA GOVERNMENT INDICATES TO US, WITHOUT DELAY, ITS WILLINGNESS TO OBSERVE THE SAME. WE CALL UPON THE INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS TO SUPERVISE AND ASSIST THE ORDERLY EVACUATION OF TROOPS.

"THE LEADERSHIP OF THE LIBERATION TIGERS HAS MADE THIS DECISION AS A GESTURE OF GOODWILL TO PREVENT ESCALATION OF VIOLENCE AND BLOODBATH AND TO CREATE A CONGENIAL ENVIRONMENT FOR SRI LANKAN SOLDIERS TO WITHDRAW FROM THE UNFAVORABLE THEATER OF WAR WITH DIGNITY AND HONOR.

"WE CALL UPON THE GOVERNMENT OF SRI LANKA TO CONSIDER OUR PROPOSAL SERIOUSLY AND RESPOND POSITIVELY WITHOUT DELAY. A POSITIVE RESPONSE, WE ARE CONFIDENT, WILL CREATE CORDIAL CONDITIONS FOR A PERMANENT CEASE-FIRE, PEACE, TALKS, AND NEGOTIATED POLITICAL SETTLEMENT FOR THE TAMIL NATIONAL QUESTION. WE ALSO WISH TO INDICATE TO THE SRI LANKA GOVERNMENT THAT IT WILL BEAR TOTAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE DISASTROUS CONSEQUENCES OF HEAVY MILITARY CASUALTIES IF IT REJECTS OUR PROPOSAL FOR DE-ESCALATION AND CONTINUES THE WAR EFFORT."

END QUOTE.

CONTEXT

13. (C) THE MEASURED TONES OF THE STATEMENT -- PARTICULARLY THE EMPHASIS ON AVOIDING A BLOOD-BATH AND HOLDING OUT THE PROSPECT OF THE CEASE-FIRE BEING A PRECURSOR TO A NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENT TO THE "TAMIL NATIONAL QUESTION" (WITHOUT SPECIFICALLY MENTIONING INDEPENDENCE) -- SHOULD PLAY WELL WITH THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY, ESPECIALLY INDIA, AS IT WRESTLES WITH IDENTIFYING APPROPRIATE RESPONSES TO THE JAFFNA OFFENSIVE.

14. (C) THE OFFER COMES AFTER INDIA HAS REJECTED ARMED INTERVENTION AND AS THE JAFFNA BATTLELINES HAVE BECOME RELATIVELY STABILIZED, WITH GSL FORCES ESTABLISHING A MAIN DEFENSIVE LINE RUNNING SOUTH-SOUTHWESTWARDS FROM POINT PEDRO TO THE JAFFNA LAGOON. WEEKEND REPORTS OF COMBAT SUGGESTED LOW- TO MODERATE INTENSITY MORTAR/ ARTILLERY EXCHANGES RATHER THAN INFANTRY OPERATIONS. BOTH GOVERNMENT AND LTTE FORCES NEED A BREATHER; WITH ITS RECENTLY ACQUIRED HEAVY ARTILLERY, HOWEVER, THE LTTE COULD INTENSIFY ITS OFFENSIVE AGAINST LARGELY DEMORALIZED GSL FORCES AFTER A RELATIVELY SHORT BREAK.

QUESTIONS AND DILEMMAS

15. (C) THE LTTE STATEMENT DOES NOT ADDRESS CERTAIN ISSUES ESSENTIAL FOR THE GSL'S FULL CONSIDERATION OF THE OFFER -- AND THEREIN LIES MANY OF THE GOVERNMENT'S DILEMMAS. THE STATEMENT DOES NOT INDICATE WHETHER A PERMISSIVE WITHDRAWAL WOULD INCLUDE ARMS AND EQUIPMENT, NOR IS ANY TIME-LINE OTHER THAN "SOON" INDICATED.

16. (C) WHILE THE GSL COULD CONTINUE TO HOLD OUT IN JAFFNA FOR SOME TIME, THE FORCES' SITUATION IS UNTENABLE UNLESS SOME IMAGINATION AND FORCEFULNESS IS DEMONSTRATED AND THE INITIATIVE REGAINED, A SCENARIO UNLIKELY OVER THE SHORT TERM. WHILE IT MIGHT MAKE SOUND MILITARY SENSE TO HAVE THE ARMY 'LIVE TO FIGHT ANOTHER DAY,' DOMESTIC POLITICAL ISSUES WOULD ARGUE FOR PRESIDENT KUMARATUNGA NOT TO GO DOWN IN HISTORY AS THE LEADER THAT CAPITULATED -- EVEN IN A WITHDRAWAL "WITH HONOR" -- TO THE LTTE.

17. (C) THE VAGUENESS OF THE LTTE STATEMENT ARGUES AGAINST THE GSL'S IMMEDIATE ACCEPTANCE OF THE OFFER -- BUT EVEN A STATEMENT INDICATING MORE INFORMATION IS NECESSARY WOULD SIGNAL A WAVERING (WITH ITS POLITICAL COST) IN THE GOVERNMENT'S RESOLVE TO HOLD JAFFNA, THE ONE GREAT MILITARY PRIZE OF KUMARATUNGA'S GOVERNMENT. SHOULD THE GOVERNMENT DECIDE TO SEEK ADDITIONAL INFORMATION, LTTE CONDITIONS COULD PROVE SO TOTALLY UNACCEPTABLE (TOO SHORT A TIME FRAME, PREEMPTIVE DISARMING OF GOVERNMENT FORCES, ETC.) THAT A CEASE-FIRE WOULD PROVE IMPOSSIBLE, LEAVING THE LTTE ON THE FIELD AS THE PARTY THAT MAGNANIMOUSLY OFFERED PEACE ONLY TO BE REJECTED. PERHAPS THE GREATEST DILEMMA OF ALL IS IF THE GSL ACCEPTED THE CEASE-FIRE IN PRINCIPLE, BUT COULD NOT ARRANGE FOR TRANSPORTATION; SRI LANKAN SHIPPING ASSETS ALONE ARE INADEQUATE TO SUPPORT OF A TIMELY WITHDRAWAL OF ITS TROOPS.

REACTIONS

18. (S) IN RESPONSE TO THE BARRAGE OF QUESTIONS FROM THE PRESS, GOVERNMENT SOURCES ARE PUBLICLY SAYING THAT THE "OFFER MUST BE STUDIED." ACCORDING TO DATT SOURCES, THE SRI LANKAN MILITARY LEADERSHIP'S REACTION AS OF LATE AFTERNOON CAN BE PARAPHRASED AS "NUTS."

19. (C) THE ICRC DELEGATION IN COLOMBO SAYS IT IS

DELIGHTED WITH THE LTTE'S OFFER, WHILE DISTURBED BY THE SANGUINARY LAST SENTENCE. THEY HAD RECEIVED NO PRIOR NOTIFICATION OF THE LTTE'S OFFER, AND, IN FACT, SAY THEY HAVE HAD NO DIRECT CONTACT WITH THE LTTE REGARDING THE POSSIBILITY AND MODALITIES OF ICRC OVERSIGHT OF A MILITARY EVACUATION. THEIR IMMEDIATE PLANS ARE TO DO NOTHING, BUT WAIT AND SEE IF THE GSL AND/OR LTTE COME DIRECTLY TO THEM WITH A REQUEST TO PLAY AN INTERMEDIARY ROLE.

¶10. (C) NORWEGIAN AMBASSADOR WESTBORG WAS UNAWARE OF THE LTTE PRESS RELEASE WHEN AMBASSADOR SPOKE WITH HIM BY PHONE LATE THIS AFTERNOON. WESTBORG'S IMMEDIATE REACTION TO THE NEWS WAS THAT IT COULD REPEAT COULD PROVIDE AN OPENING FOR TALKS BUT HE HAD MANY QUESTIONS. IF THE LTTE CONSULTED WITH GON REPS IN LONDON OR OSLO ON THIS CALL FOR A CEASE-FIRE AND NEGOTIATIONS, NORWAYS MAN IN COLOMBO WAS LEFT OUT OF THE LOOP.

COMMENT

¶11. (C) WHETHER THE LTTE OFFER IS SERIOUS OR NOT (AND HERE WE AGAIN NOTE THAT THE LTTE SET THE OFFER UP IN A MANNER ALLOWING EASY WITHDRAWAL OF THE RUG), THE ORGANIZATION HAS ALREADY SCORED SOME REAL PSYOPS POINTS WITH THE TROOPS UNDER THREAT IN JAFFNA AND POTENTIALLY WITH ELEMENTS OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY HOPING FOR A SUSTAINABLE PEACE IN SRI LANKA.

¶12. (C) WHETHER THE GSL REJECTS OR ACCEPTS THE OFFER -- AND WE BELIEVE A REJECTION IS MOST LIKELY -- THE OFFER ITSELF AND THE GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSE WILL LIKELY FIGURE HEAVILY IN THE EXTENDED DEFENSE DEBATE SCHEDULED TO BEGIN IN PARLIAMENT TOMORROW AS WELL AS IN THE DELIBERATIONS OF THE OTHER COUNTRIES THAT SRI LANKA HAS APPROACHED FOR ONE KIND OR ANOTHER OF ASSISTANCE.

DONNELLY